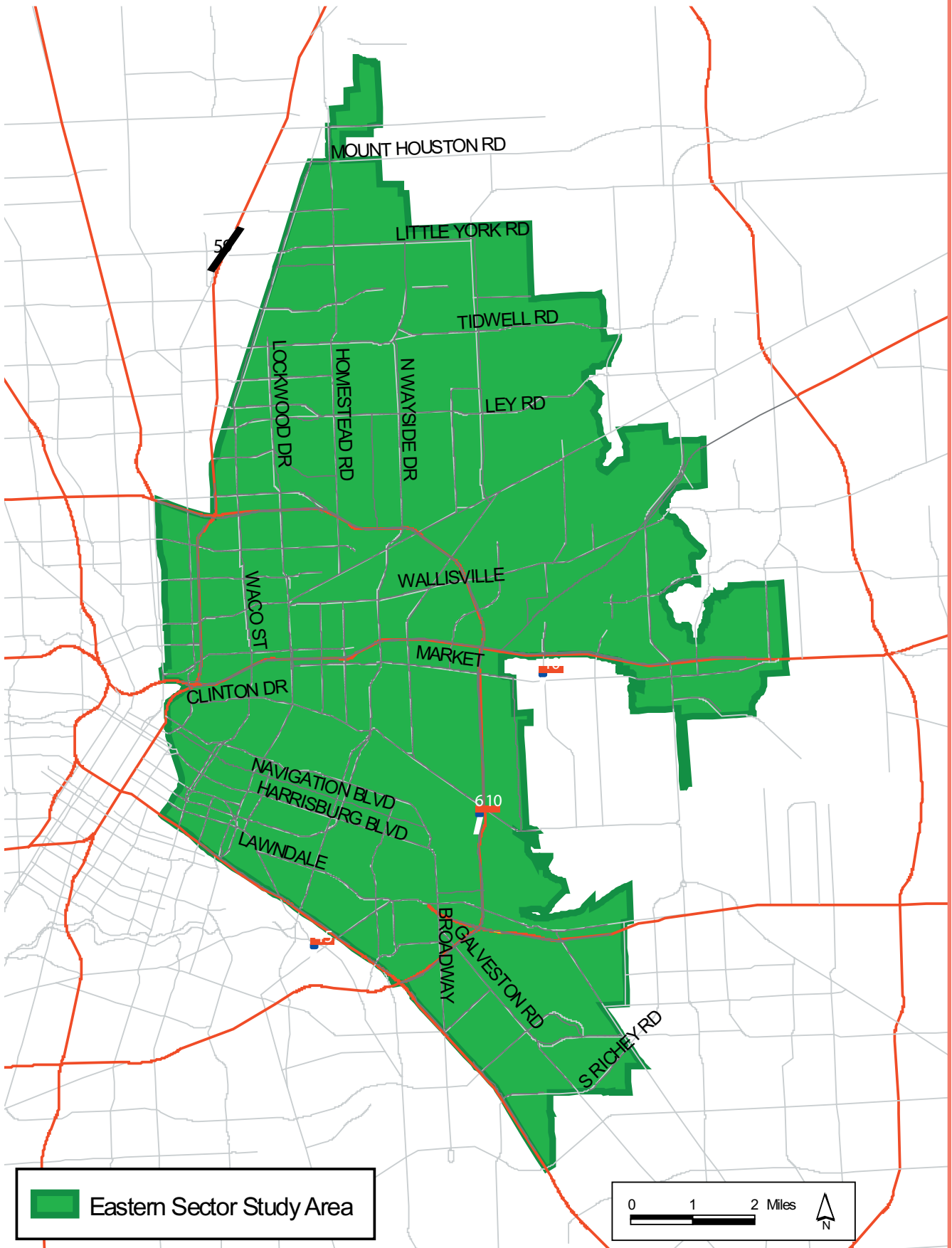

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Map 1: Eastern Sector Study Area



Source: COHGIS

Executive Summary

According to the US Census of 2000, the eastern sector of the City faces a range of challenges from inadequate infrastructure to deteriorating housing and quality of life. Investing in the area would benefit the City as a whole. Additional investment in infrastructure and low-income housing in the Eastern Sector of Houston would yield much needed tax revenues and improve the quality of life for the residents of the area.

Overview

The eastern sector covers 71.3 square miles or 45,603 acres of land (11.3 percent of the City of Houston). Industrial land covers 17 percent, and vacant and undeveloped land is higher at 32 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, the area experienced a dramatic increase in Hispanic population (66.9 percent) and a 41.5 percent decrease in White population.

The Eastern Sector has 12 parcels of undeveloped land with more than 100 acres. The area north of I-10 has a rural feel with large tracts of undeveloped and underdeveloped land amid primarily single-family residential land uses. The area to the south provides a more balanced land use mix with bigger tracts of undeveloped and underdeveloped land primarily mixed industrial or commercial uses.

The Eastern Sector is also largely known for its high concentration of industrial land along the Houston Ship Channel.

Population

According to the 2000 Census, the total population of the Eastern Sector was 273,412, approximately 14% of the City's total. Also, population in the Eastern Sector grew 4% between 1990 and 2000 compared to a citywide growth rate of nearly 20%. The greater share of this population is concentrated in East Little York/Homestead (22,140), Northshore (27,350), Greater Fifth Ward (22,211), and Magnolia Park (21,302). Population density in the area north of the Bayou is 2.2 persons per acre. South of the Bayou the population density is 6.8 persons per acre.

The Eastern Sector experienced significant shifts in Hispanic and White populations between 1990 and 2000. The Hispanic population increased 66.9% in the area north of the Bayou (East Little York/Homestead, Trinity Gardens, East Houston, Settegast, Kashmere, El Dorado, Hunterwood, Greater Fifth Ward, Denver Harbor, Pleasantville and Northshore). Conversely, the White population decreased 41.5%. Settegast had the greatest population loss of all the Super Neighborhoods in the area.

Hispanic population also increased significantly in the area south of the Buffalo Bayou (Denver Harbor, Clinton Park, Second Ward, Eastwood, Harrisburg, Pecan Park, Park Place, Meadowbrook, Magnolia and Lawndale). White and Black populations decreased in these areas. Lawndale/Eastwood experienced the largest population increase (6.8%) while Clinton Park/Fidelity experienced the largest population decrease (19.4%) since 1990.

A majority of the population 25 years and older have no high school diploma. In addition, the 2000 Census records show that the Eastern Sector has the lowest percentage of persons with college degrees compared to the rest of the city.

Development Issues

Major issues affecting the stability and development potential for the Eastern Sector include: 1) deterioration of neighborhoods and coexistence of heavy industries, 2) an unattractive and rural image, 3) drainage and flooding problem, 4) petrochemical waste issues, and 5) an aging or inadequate infrastructure and rail safety.

1. Deterioration of neighborhoods and coexistence with heavy industries

The coexistence of heavy industries and neighborhoods creates a safety problem and hampers development. Industries create jobs to sustain the area's economy but at the same time they create pollution. To spur development and improve industrial safety, the City needs to create transition areas between residential and industrial land uses by encouraging areas of appropriate mixed uses such as commercial/office and industrial/commercial.

2. Unattractive and Rural Image

Most of the Eastern Sector especially to the north and along the City limits exhibits a rural and unattractive image. The area has numerous pockets of developable land infill. The City could improve the image by encouraging affordable housing in the proposed development mix. This effort could also be achieved through a land-banking program the City recently implemented and through a program that would offer incentives to neighborhood industries to relocate to industrial parks with freeway access.

3. Drainage and Flooding Problem

The Buffalo Bayou, the Greens Bayou, and several other small bayous drain into the Eastern Sector. These drainage corridors provide an excellent opportunity to develop parks that would enhance the quality of life within the Eastern Sector community and the City at large. Although the Buffalo Bayou Plan already addresses some park and drainage issues, the introduction of similar plans along the other bayous would provide added aesthetics that attract development and improve the quality of life.

4. Environmental issues

The Eastern Sector has the highest concentration of petrochemical industries in the entire city. While these industries create jobs to sustain the area economy, the pollutants they emit are a health hazard and may conflict with the current federal Clean Air Act. The Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area falls under the Environmental Protection Agency clean air non-attainment area. Although occasional accidental plant fires have often been contained with little or no life lost, the environment still poses a health and safety concern. The City and industries in the area work with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to meet State and EPA requirements for Clean Air.

The area also has two inactive landfills and significant amount of industrial sludge and brownfields. These are developable lands that can be cleaned and converted into economic use. The City should promote conversion of inactive landfills to golf courses. Areas with golf courses serve as a magnet for high value development and enhancement to the community's quality of life.

5. Evidence of Aging or inadequate Infrastructure to Meet Growth, Mobility and Safety Needs

Rail, road and water infrastructure crisscross the Eastern Sector. Some of this infrastructure is outdated and would not meet future growth needs of the area. Some rail crossings need effective signaling or grade-separation to improve safety. Some thoroughfares need to be designated as truck routes to reduce fast deterioration of local roads and impact on the community. Major thoroughfares such as Clinton Drive, Liberty Road, Harrisburg, Wayside, Navigation, Lyons Street, 610 Loop, I-10 W., US 90, Maxey Road and Market Street are used heavily by truck traffic to and from the port. Such a designation would improve general mobility, traffic safety and minimize traffic gridlock.

The area has a number of positive attributes that provide a significant opportunity for economic development; however, without a long-range strategy to guide economic development over the next 10 to 20 years, the opportunity to affect change may be lost. A comprehensive, long-range strategy for addressing future growth and development as well as for addressing existing environmental and other problems, which are creating or exacerbating blight and deterioration, is needed. Such a strategy must consider regional and local priorities.

Growth and Development Potential

To better illustrate the growth potential in Eastern Houston, population, employment and cost/revenue projections were developed for two micro-areas, Harrisburg to the south and Wayside to the north for a 25-year period. The selected micro-areas have unique and varied characteristics that could spur future development potential. Development potentials in Wayside are associated with large parcels of vacant land while those along Harrisburg are associated with numerous parcels of infill land.

Population and employment growth in the Harrisburg micro-area is projected at 3% each year. This projection assumes an aggressive growth rate due to intervention in infrastructure and related investment by the City. The projection increase corresponds to 6,911 single-family units and 7,223 multi-family residential units for the 25-year projection period.

Wayside population and employment is projected to increase by 2.5%. The increase assumes an aggressive intervention in infrastructure and similar investments by the City during the projection period. This projection would yield 3,428 single-family units, 170 multi-family units and 4,453 jobs in the projection period.

Strategies

Given the scarcity of funds, the City would need to involve private and volunteer organizations to stimulate investment in the area. Innovative financial mechanisms such as TIRZ would also need to be employed with traditional resources to cover projected investment costs.

Critical to successfully stimulating new development in this area is collaboration among the stakeholders. Similar to the Main Street Coalition, the City could foster the creation of a coalition of private property owners, non-profit organizations, residents and relevant governmental agencies. Such a coalition would:

1. Take the lead in developing a unified, long-range vision/plan for the area that sets priorities and outlines a set of strategies and actions to achieve the desired vision. Capitalizing on the area's opportunities and assets, the plan would identify opportunities for strategically leveraging public investment that would attract private investment and development.
2. Market the plan, promoting opportunities to potential developers and marshal the support of the local community.
3. Ensure continued coordination among investors and stakeholders and play a strong role in influencing the pattern of private sector development in the sector by representing the interests and concerns of the major stakeholders.

A vital antecedent to forming such a coalition would be an open dialogue with vested stakeholders such as major landowners, investors and developers about the needs and future of this area. In addition, a review of proposed investment by local

governmental agencies, such as the Harris County Flood Control District's project on Sims Bayou, TXDOT infrastructure and the City of Houston CIP commitments, is essential to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that investment is targeted to priority areas identified in the plan.

Financing needed infrastructure improvements to attract new development will require investigating other financing tools such as Special Districts, Enterprise Zones and Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones and developing a set of incentives. Special districts have recently been introduced in the study area to pay for part of the infrastructure costs of new development.

Finally, an Infrastructure Master Plan that addresses roads and utility needs and anticipates future development/redevelopment, with a timeline for committing to undertake infrastructure improvements, will provide a positive direction to encourage investment in the area. Currently, development in the area is difficult due to the lack of infrastructure and the inability of investors to bear the cost of infrastructure improvements needed to make development feasible. Such a plan will ensure timely investment and make the area more attractive to development.